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ABSTRACT

A historical case study is presented of the creation of elementary schools for the nomadic tribes of Fars Province in southern Iran (Persia). A brief historical review of the educational opportunities and socioeconomic background of the Fars tribes is given. Additionally, the gradual expansion of the impact of bringing education to the previously uneducated tribes is traced. The procedures used and assistance received while creating the new tribal educational system are described, and the influence of the American educational system upon a foreign and socially different culture is evidenced. (AL)

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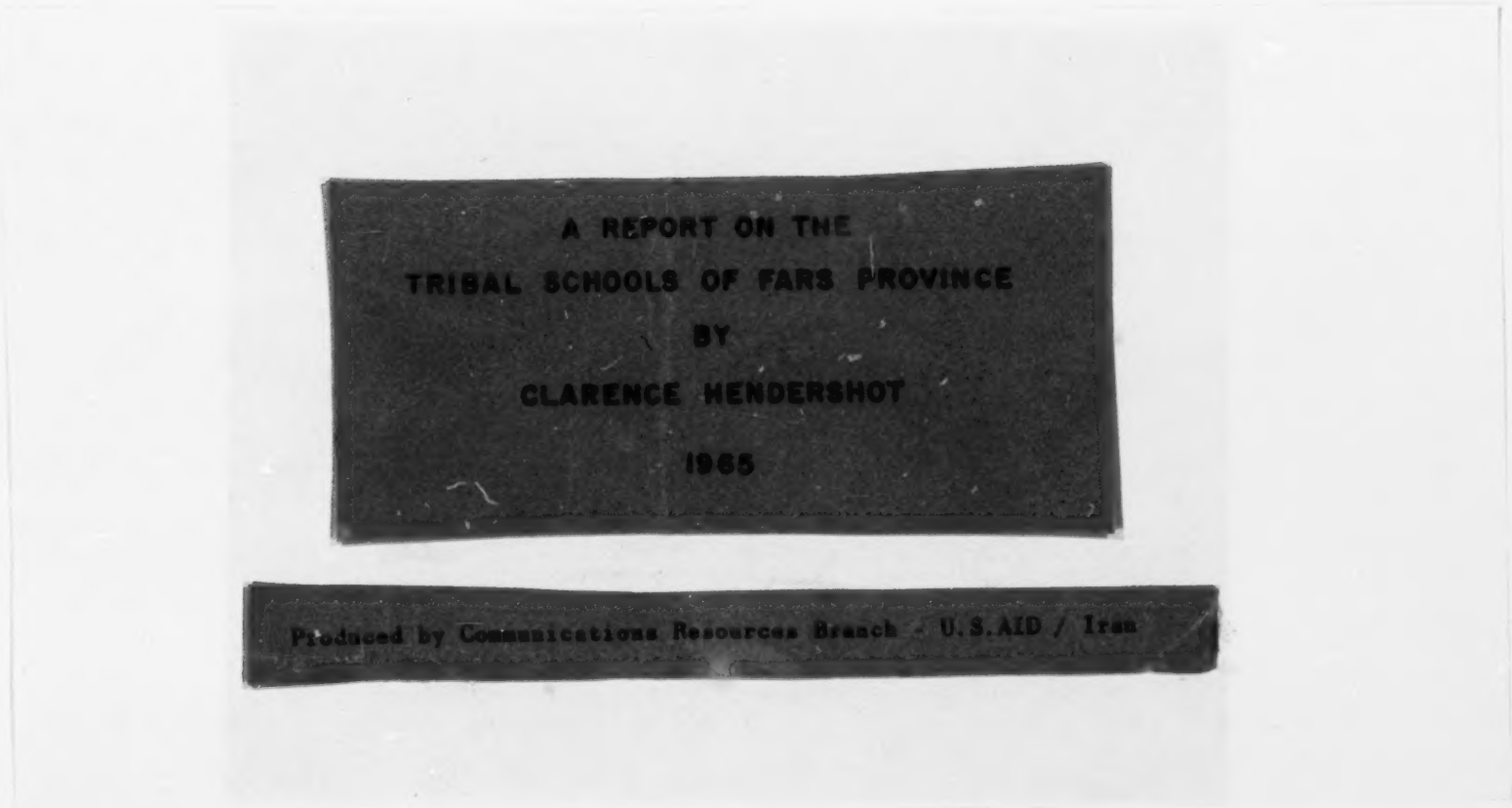
WHITE TENTS IN THE MOUNTAINS

A sight which is becoming increasingly familiar in the mountains of Fars province in southern Persia is a white spot midst boxlike black goat hair tents. The latter have for centuries marked the camps of the migra - tory tribes which move seasonally with their flocks between winter and summer pastures. As one approaches, the white spot becomes a round tent with a pyramiding center pole, topped with a green, white and red flag. It is one of the 423 elementary schools which have been established during the



past twelve years for the children of families that heretofore had little or no opportunity for education. Within the tent prominently displayed is a picture of His Imperial Majesty. In addition to the flag and the pic- ture, a map of Iran, a small blackboard and rugs are the only furnishings.

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Nearby may be a smaller white or tan colored tent, the home of the teacher. When the tribe moves, the tents are loaded on a camel, or possibly a couple of donkeys. The development of this system of moving schools is one of the miracles of modern Persia, a miracle which is the result of the dreams and plans of one man.

For milleniums the tribes, which still constitute a large segment of the population of Persia, moved freely through the mountains and valleys of that ancient land. Often they preyed on the sedentary villagers. Sometimes they warred among themselves for choice pastures and water, but for the most part through the centuries understandings had come to exist as to their respective pasture lands and migration routes. Each tribe was an autonomous unit (or cluster of units) governed (and not infrequently exploited) by its own great khan, sub-khans and clan leaders. The primary concern of the central government was to keep the tribes from uniting against it, and secondly to use their virile mounted men to resist invaders and fight foreign wars. The melding of all of the people of the country into a nation-state with a central government controlling the affairs of all of the people, maintaining local law and order has only recently been attempted and is still resisted in some tribal areas. A modern system of taxation remains to be established, despite efforts at reform over the past four decades.

The 1956 census reported three-fourths of the population to be speakers of languages other than Persian. These languages (with minor exceptions) remain unwritten. Consequently, these peoples have no recorded history or literature. Gradually Persian, as the official language of Iran, has become the language of record as well as the medium for general communication. However, to many tribespeople Persian is still a strange language. These non-

assimilated nomadic tribes have come into the mid-twentieth century with the mores, lore, and economic institutions of their forebearers of millenniums ago.

When General Reza Khan became Shah Reza in 1925, to make his new dynasty more secure, and to achieve his design to meld the heterogeneous inhabitants of his domain into a nation-state, he determined to break the power of the tribes and force them to give up their nomadic life. A somewhat modernized army made this possible. Some tribal chiefs were imprisoned; others exiled and still others required to live in the capital under surveillance. One of the tribes which was singled out for particular attention was the Ghashgai.

For perhaps three centuries the Ghashgai have lived a nomadic existence in the mountains of Fars, the heart of the ancient empire of Cyrus, Darius, and the other Achamenians. Exactly when they arrived, or how, neither they nor anyone else knows. Their language (Turki) and their lore suggest that at one time they livedin what is now northeastern Persia and the southern Caucasus region. It is surmised that at some point early in the seventeenth century they migrated before other tribes pushing south from central Asia, or possibly they were moved to this area by some ruling monarch to replace some rebellious tribe or to protect the frontier. They have a tradition of military prowess. Twenty or more subtribes or clans comprise the great tribe which numbers approximately 400,000. In religion, they are non-fanatic Shi'as.

The Khan of Amaleh sub-tribe was one of those forced to live in Tehran, since the Khans of the Ghashgai came from this group. Many of the tribal leaders and their sons became the victims of this imposed sedentary existence and the lures of city life. Others found in the new en-

vironment an opportunity for self improvement. There were schools which did not exist in the tribal areas. There was intellectual challenge. There was contact with foreign ideas which were being brought back to Persia by the students who had been sent abroad by the new Shah for education.

One of the young men to be challenged by this new situation was Mohamad Bahmanbegi, son of the khan of Amaleh. He graduated from high school and then enrolled in the new University of Tehran Faculty of Law. During these years the Second World War brought many British, Russians, and later Americans to Persia. He saw the exiling of the Shah. He experienced the humilation of the country under foreign occupation. He became deeply concerned about the moral and political weakness which he observed, and the corruption evident on all sides. He still thought of himself as a "tribesman", and saw in the tribes an uncorrupted human resource sorely needed for the upbuilding of Persia.

On receiving his degree in law in 1945, Mr. Bahmanbegi, as he is commonly known, returned to his tribe. "For the next five years (he) devoted his efforts to his family and clan, engaging mainly in sheep herding. During this time he travelled among all the tribes of Fars and was struck by the fact that the 400,000 tribal people had remained almost completely deprived of even the most elementary education. Repeatedly he observed that tribesmen travelled many kilometers to nearby towns or villages to find someone who could read or write for them. The fact that no knowledge of civil law and procedure existed caused great difficulty in the daily lives of these people. These observations in addition to his desire to improve the general level of tribal existence lead Mr. Bahmanbegi to abandon his private pursuits and take up education as a full-time activity." [1]

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1. Kenneth E. Livingston in unpublished paper.

This was not a new idea for Mr. Bahmanbegi. In 1945 he had published a book in which he stressed education as basic for the development and settling of the tribes. He had established a school for his own tribal group with the cooperation of other members of his family. In 1951 Mr. Bahmanbegi visited the U.S. where he took a keen interest in social processes. He was particularly impressed by the public schools. The following year he returned with a mission. The problem now was, how to carry it out. The Government had never taken any interest in the tribes beyond keeping them under surveillance and raising military levies.

As a happy coincidence at this particular time a new economic and technical assistance program had been introduced into Persia, known as "Point Four". Why should not these Americans help his tribal people? They were already giving considerable assistance to the improvement of education in the established schools in the cities and some villages. Raising the question with a friend, he was advised to contact the Point Four Director for Fars Province, who happened at that moment to be eating in the same restaurant. Director Bryant, alert for opportunities to help Persians meet "felt needs", suggested that Mr. Bahmanbegi contact the Point Four Education Advisor for Fars, Mr. Glen Gagon.

With this encouragement, Mr. Bahmanbegi proceeded to Shiraz (the capital of Fars). He sought out Mr. Gagon and told him of his plans, and his needs. It so happened that Mr. Gagon had already been giving thought to a school program for the tribes. Three years earlier a group of foreign consultants had identified the problem and suggested "the moving school, designed to accompany the tribe while in its annual migration." 2.

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2. Overseas Consultants, Inc., N.Y., Seven Tear Development Plan for the Plan Organization of the Imperial Government of Iran, Education volume, 1949, p. 137.

Mr. Gagon welcomed the suggestion. Precisely what was necessary, he asked. The answer was tents, teachers, and classroom supplies. Mr. Gagon, replied that he would undertake to provide the tents for classrooms and the supplies, if Mr. Bahmanbegi would provide the teachers. He had no funds for salaries, or for training, and training was necessary since there were no trained teachers available. The Government had also given some thought to education for the tribes. The construction of three boarding schools had been started, but like so many other schools, were abandoned unfinished. It was clear that the Ministry of Education could not be counted on for much help. At the same time, Point Four was not prepared to carry the total cost of such a program. The decision was to seek financial participation by the tribes. Mr. Bahmanbegi was sure that such cooperation would be forthcoming, that the chiefs would be receptive to the plan.

To give the program direction, six objectives were established.

1. To extend educational opportunities beyond the leadership group.
2. To make it possible for children to get an education and at the same time be with their parents.
3. To make it possible for school children to assist with the family work and assume other responsibilities of family life.
4. To create boarding school facilities for older children to get high school training.
5. To provide a means for training teachers to provide a continuing supply of teachers for the tribal schools.
6. To provide supervision for the schools to assure their continued operation and progressively raise the standards of teaching.

It was the strong belief of Mr. Bahmanbegi that the only way for the Government to make useful loyal citizens of the tribal people was to educate them. It was also the surest way of promoting the Government objective of getting the tribes to settle.

The list of equipment and supplies prepared for each school included a school tent, a latrine tent, portable lap desks, textbooks, abacus, portable blackboard, eraser, crayons, pencils, notebooks, colored crayons, glue, and playground equipment for football and volleyball. The total cost was estimated at $200.

Mr. Bahmanbegi sought out men of means and other tribal leaders. He appealed to them to contribute funds for the support of teachers. Soon he had promises for the support of 117 teachers. With this encouragement, Mr. Gagon ordered tents and supplies. Mr. Bahmanbegi began to seek out potential teachers. This was not easy. The situation was complicated by an unexpected delay of the Ministry in giving approval to the plan, forcing the suspension of a training session already scheduled for the teachers. However, "after much discussion, explanation, debating and pleading, the Ministry gave its approval." On August 1, 1953, 109 teachers met for six weeks of training. 105 completed the course. Some were secured from tribal families who had settled in Shiraz. A few had managed to achieve literacy through the Mullah schools. Still half of the number had to be recruited from villages, not tribesmen but people who had had close association with the tribes. These inadequately educated, slightly trained men became the first teachers under the new program in fall of 1953.

Mr. Bahmanbegi had his own ideas of education for the tribes. Not having had formal training in education, he was not inhibited by traditional ideas on methods, curriculum, discipline and training. Observation as well as experience told him that the first lesson the prospective teacher needed to learn was personal hygiene. Cleanliness was made a requirement. Later when a normal school had been established, to assure a complete change of clothing once a week, each teacher-in-training was required to contribute

one piece of soiled clothing to the laundry each day. Household and camp sanitation followed. Then came the development of attitudes of cheerfulness, hope, expectation and persistent effort. He sought to stir their imagination, to stimulate initiative, to foster a deep concern for the improvement of their own people. Finally came the teaching of the formal curriculum. The curriculum for the schools was fixed by the Ministry of Education. It was the same for all schools, urban and rural. The curriculum for the teachers, however, was developed by Mr. Bahmanbegi with the able assistance of Mr. Gagon.

Since the schools were to be conducted in the national language, a special burden was placed on both the teachers and pupils to whom it was a foreign tongue. The objective from the beginning was not only to teach "three R's", but to stir whatever spark of curiosity, ambition and resourcefulness might be latent in each teacher and child. There was to be no regimentation, no suppression of spirit, no corporal punishment. This was almost the reverse of the customary practice in existing schools. At a later time Mr. Bahmanbegi was to visit the United States again to observe education with special attention to the schools for the American Indians. He returned with reinforced confidence in his educational philosophy and increased conviction and determination. All that he knows about modern education, he says, is what he has read in books and seen in American schools.

The team of Bahmanbegi and Gagon worked most effectively. Mr. Gagon cooperated with the teacher training. He travelled with Mr. Bahmanbegi to the tribes to assist in establishing schools and later with their supervision. To facilitate American assistance, Mr. Bahmanbegi was placed on the Point Four payroll.

The schools were not restricted to the Ghashgai clans. Other tribes and clans were included, the most numerous of whom were the Baseri. Mr. Bahmanbegi showed a remarkable ability to get all of the clans to participate. Some of the more conservative would not at first permit the girls to attend with the boys, but this gradually broke down.

Not everything ran smoothly in those first years. The collection of funds for the teachers' salaries was time consuming and not always successful. The Persian government provided no assistance or encouragement. Some of the Americans, to whom he looked for support, Mr. Bahmanbegi says regretfully, gave him little encouragement.

During the first year (1953-54), seventy-nine schools were opened. The response of the tribes was enthusiastic. The teachers performed well, but experience soon showed that those drawn from the tribes had the advantage. They had greater acceptance and fewer problems of personal adjustment to tribal conditions. In the tribes, the teachers received high status, second only to that of the chiefs. In the summer of 1954 a second group were trained.

The curriculum used was that established for all Persian elementary schools. The teachers, however, were not certified by the Ministry of Education. Therefore, the schools received no official recognition. An early objective was to secure endorsement by the Ministry. Two years passed before this was fully achieved. The four-year program could now lead to a certificate granted by the Ministry of Education which qualified the recipient for further education. It also meant financial support. The teachers were accredited by the Ministry, placed on its payroll, and granted the national civil service privileges. Mr. Bahmanbegi was appointed supervisor of the program. His transfer to the Ministry payroll, he recalls, resulted in a fifty percent reduction in salary.

One of the first actions of the Ministry was to substitute for the virtually untrained tribal teachers young men who had received the formal training provided for village and city teachers. However, these city-bred teachers proved unable to adjust to tribal conditions, or to establish the necessary rapport with the tribes. The wisdom of using tribesmen for teachers, even though less well trained, was quickly recognized. There was a need, though, to raise their general educational and professional standards. To accomplish this, the Tribal Normal School was established in Shiraz in 1955. The present building opened in the fall of 1956 with 60 enrolled. By this time many tribal children had passed the fourth grade, and some had reached the sixth, making possible the recruitment of better educated teacher candidates. To assure the highest possible level of training, the Ministry provides teachers for the normal school. Mr. Bahmanbegi supervised the instruction and taught classes on tribal matters.

Each year seventy to eighty are selected from five times that number of applicants. Now the completion of the sixth grade is required for entrance, but many candidates have completed the ninth grade. The past year six students had completed the twelfth. A notable recent development has been the admission of girls. Six were admitted in 1962. When certain religious leaders protested this breaking with tradition (coeducation is forbidden at the high school level), the problem was solved by inviting a mullah (priest) to teach the girls. However, the precedent had been established. Seven more were admitted in 1963, and 16 in 1964. In the twelve years the program has been in progress, 465 teachers have been trained. Of these all but one are still teaching. The missing one was taken by death. This is a record none can beat, and few can match. The school enrolment has increased to 15,000.

The formal training program is followed up by close personal supervision by Mr. Bahmanbegi and by periodic inservice courses. The teachers are brought to the center to receive instruction and exchange ideas. One of the basic points in their training is that they are to show originality in their teaching methods. They are shown many ways of dealing with a given situation or problem, not just one. They are then told to adapt what they have learned to the needs they meet.

An air of orderly informality marks these schools. The boys and girls squat together on colorful rugs, usually facing a small blackboard resting on crude posts like an easel, often with a bag of chalk lying on the ground underneath. The upper classes may be sitting in small groups nearby in the open, or in the shade, if any is to be found. All are intent on their books, or the blackboard. The monitor system is common, the older children teaching the younger, or one child works a problem on the blackboard while the others watch, being quick to raise a hand if an error is noted. The concentration of mind, the alertness to every development, the complete absorption of their minds in the learning situation make for a speed of accomplishment not found in many schools.

The children may be of any age from six to thirteen. Older people, some of them apparently indulgent grandparents, stand about and watch, or squat at the edge of the tent. If the school is newly established, all ages may be starting with the first grade. However, each may progress at his own speed. After a year some will have completed a normal two year program. This often happens. The schools normally teach through the fourth grade. Where the teacher is qualified to teach the fifth and sixth grades, these are added, about one-third of the schools have six grades. For further education, the children must go to Shiraz or some other city.

Recently as an experiment a dormitory was established in Shiraz for tribal children to attend the city high schools, but it proved financially unfeasible. The tribal people fear corruption of their young people by the cinemas and other amusements of the city. They look forward to the time when they may have special high schools for tribal children.

The program begun with the Ghashgai was later extended to other tribes in Fars. Among the major groups now being served are the Ghashgai, the Baseri, Shah Bolok, and Arab. Of the estimated 400,000 tribes people in the province, perhaps one-third are being reached. The number of schools is being increased by about 80 annually.

These tent schools are an unforgettable inspiration to visitors, and a challenge to all other schools. When the children pass on to the city schools, they almost invariably excel their city cousins. A test was given to 36 sixth graders in a Shiraz school, six of whom had come from the tribal schools. Of the six, one received the highest score and the other five were among the top ten. After a ten-day visit to scores of tribal schools, many in remote places, an American educator remarked that he had witnessed some of the finest teaching he had seen anywhere. To account for the superior accomplishment of the children from the tribal schools, this observer, who had examined and witnessed the examination of both village and tribal children, speculates that it is in part the desire of these mountain people to excel, their respect for teachers, and the fact that their native talent has not been "creamed off." Part of the success he credits also to "the intelligent, energetic and devoted supervision and leadership."[3]

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3. Earl Vandrell in report on the tribal schools.

One cannot fail to be impressed by the intense interest of the children. As in the old-fashioned one-teacher school, the younger are challenged by the more advanced. Sometimes the latter are used to teach the former. All are eager to demonstrate their ability to read, to write, to recite poetry, to work arithmetic problems. A call for volunteers results in a forest of upstretched arms. When others have been called on, a child will insist that he have his turn. Faced with an examination by the visiting supervisor, there is no quailing or hesitation, but an evidence of a clear sense of challenge. One can understand why the supervisor sees in these children a human resource vitally needed by the country. "It is not accidental", states the editors of the Iran Almanac, "that all the dynasties that came to power belonged to the tribes."[4]

The tribal people differ from the villagers in their dress, their language, their customs as well as their migratory existence, and are proud of it. Their women are not veiled. They dress in bright colors. They care for the flocks, milk the goats, weave the black goat-hair tent cloth, manage their homes. When migrating, they ride the horses. The men use horses and camels, mostly the former for riding and the latter for burdens; the villagers usually use donkeys to ride and for transport. Boys are taught horsemanship, hunting and the use of weapons. Their outdoor vigorous life makes them more virile and aggressive than their sedentary cousins. In these children, wrote one observer, "is the lurking promise of another kind of Iran in which energy, courage, and loyalty play a strong role.[5]

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4. Echo of Iran, Iran Almanac, 1963, p. 419.

5. Gregory Lima, Keyhan International, Tehran, August 28, 1963.

To sum up the program in terms of the number of teachers, of schools, and of children taught is not difficult. But to evaluate the accomplishments in terms of physical and mental energies released, of expanded horizons for children and parents alike, of the potentiality for leadership of these vigorous, ambitious young people, of the inspiration that may yet arouse in the minds of other tribesmen and villagers is impossible at this time. One can not live with these children and observe them without a strong feeling that from the power being released in them there may come the leadership vitally needed by the new Persia.

The benefits from this educational effort are not restricted to the children. Improved sanitation has resulted in better health. Literacy has been increased among the adults. Their horizons have been extended. Better living is resulting. Training in health improvement has received special attention.

One who has been concerned with technical assistance programs, and has seen many projects fall far short of the desired results, inevitably asks, WHY? Why has this program been successful above others?

In part, the answer must be sought in the happy combination of opportunity and competent, devoted leadership. Mr. Bahmanbegi has headed the program throughout. Tempting offers of other responsibilities have been refused. Too often when an individual proves successful in a given activity he is taken from it to start another or to rescue an ailing one. Equally important has been the intelligence, devotion, and human understanding which Mr. Bahmanbegi has afforded. Until the number of children came to exceed 9,000, he personally examined each child yearly. But success could not have been achieved without the equal interest and eagerness of the tribesmen. The requests for schools far exceed the supply of

teachers. Four or five candidates apply for every one which can be accepted for teacher training, some now with a twelfth grade education.

A critical factor from the beginning has been the support of the American technical assistance program. Without the funds provided for tents and supplies, and for the financial support provided Mr. Bahmanbegi, the program might not have been started. Without the moral and professional support of Point Four educational advisors, Mr. Bahmanbegi says he could not have accomplished what he has. American financial assistance was reduced to a negligible amount when the Ministry of Education assumed responsibility for the program, but technical assistance and encouragement have been continued to the present.

Extremely important throughout has been the endorsement and support of His Imperial Majesty. The schools have responded with devotion and loyalty. When banditry and violence disturbed the area a few months ago, the schools continued in session. When others were barred from the area, Mr. Bahmanbegi continued his supervisory visits to the schools. The teachers and schools avoided involvement.

Much remains to be done. Many children are still not reached. For those in school, there is need to enrich the present curriculum by including still more material and activities directly applicable to their immediate needs, such as animal husbandry, agriculture, health, social processes, citizenship, etc. Opportunities need to be created for high school training and even higher education for the more capable and ambitious, particularly in fields in which they can be helpful to their own people. Some should continue to rise to positions of national leadership. Some should be preparing to follow in the course of Mr. Bahmanbegi.